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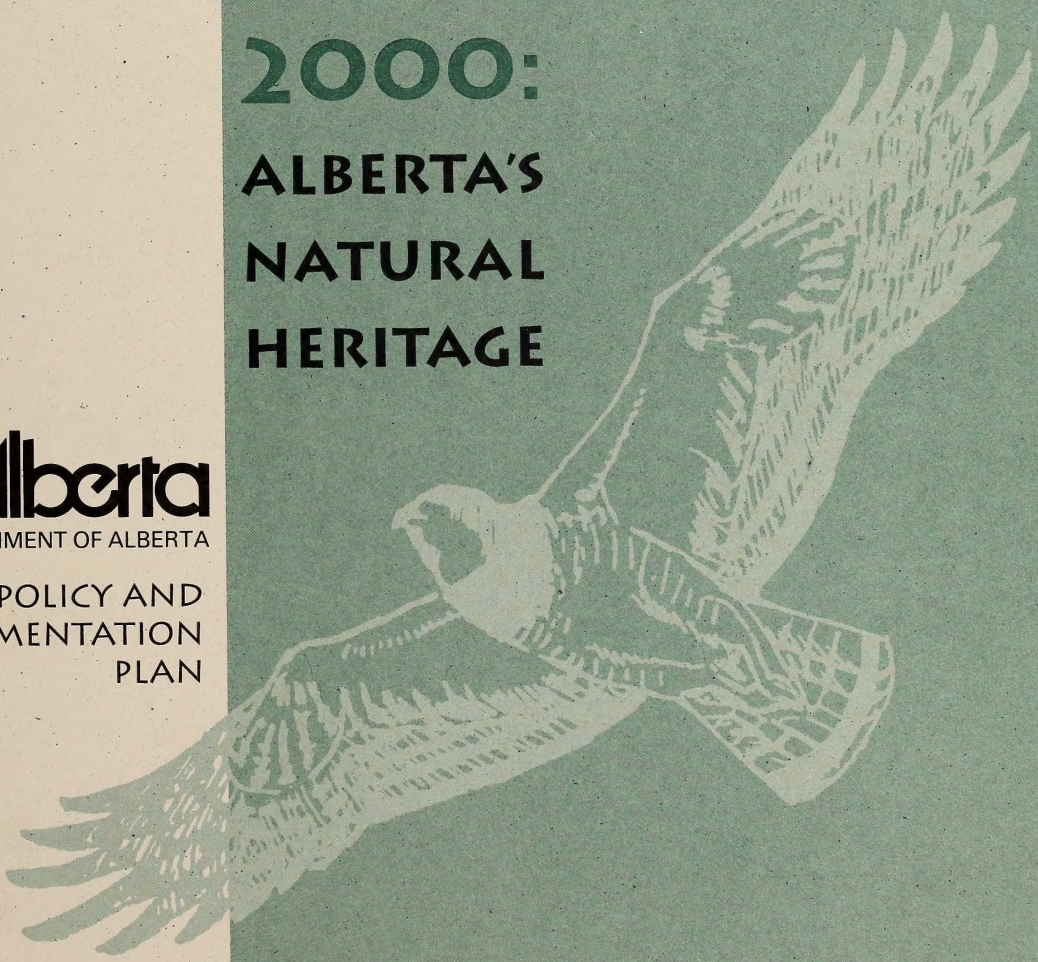
SPECIAL PLACES 2000: ALBERTA'S NATURAL HERITAGE



Alberta
GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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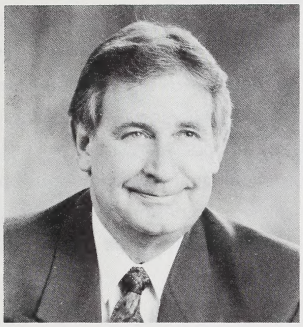
MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER



Albertans enjoy an unparalleled quality of life due largely to our abundant natural resources as well as our healthy and active economy. The Government of Alberta is committed to providing responsible stewardship of these resources, and continually improving our quality of life, through sustainable development - paying attention to both the environment and the economy. An atmosphere of certainty is necessary for continued economic growth, and completing our protected areas system will provide a framework that allows for economic and environmental stability.

Special Places 2000 represents an important component of our commitment to sustainable development. Ensuring that the complete diversity of Alberta's unique landscapes exists for future generations is a reflection of the leadership required to effectively manage our resources. Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to participate in the announcement of the Special Places 2000 initiative.

A great number of Albertans, industry and stakeholder groups took the opportunity to provide us with their points of view over the past two years during the Special Places consultation process. Albertans will continue to play a key role in the implementation process. The information produced on Special Places 2000 will hopefully encourage you to remain involved and up-to-date with this most important initiative.

The long term success of the initiative depends on Albertans working together to make the best decisions. I look forward to the not too distant future when our system of protected areas is completed, and all Albertans can take advantage of the benefits that will result.

Sincerely,

Ralph Klein

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Over the past two years, Albertans took the opportunity to provide their points of view on a draft policy that would see Alberta complete its system of protected areas. Special Places 2000, a policy that will preserve representative samples of our province's diverse landscapes, is the result of that extensive public consultation process.

It is with great pleasure that we introduce the "made in Alberta" Special Places policy and implementation process that, upon completion, will ensure that future generations of Albertans can enjoy our rich natural heritage.

Albertans and stakeholder groups from across the province contributed directly to the development of Special Places. Similarly, the long term success of Special Places will depend upon their continued involvement - from nomination of candidate sites, to the designation of new Special Places, and through support of the day to day management of these sites. Those Albertans directly affected by the policy and the designation of new sites, will participate directly, at the grass roots level. At the completion of our network of Special Places, all Albertans will reap the benefits.

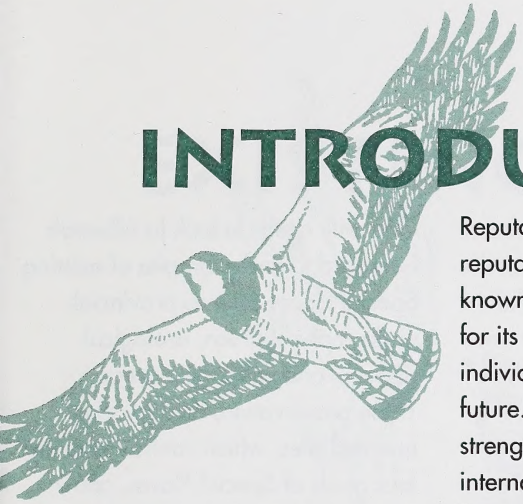
In addition, Special Places assists us in achieving our goal of sustainable development. Balancing our environmental responsibilities with economic realities provides a challenge with no easy solutions. Developing a protected areas policy that would be accepted by the majority of Albertans was not easy, but it was necessary. However, we are confident that the Special Places program, with its emphasis on community stakeholder involvement, will allow us to designate and manage protected areas with the support of all Albertans.

Special Places 2000 seeks to balance the goal of preservation, with the parallel goals of outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism/economic development. Not all goals will be met in each Special Place. Levels of protection, access and development will be addressed through management plans developed by stakeholders based on sound scientific criteria keeping the overall intent of the Special Places 2000 policy in mind.

I wish to thank all Albertans who have had a hand in developing this policy, and encourage all to remain informed as this most important initiative progresses.

Ty Lund

Ty Lund
Minister
Alberta Environmental Protection



INTRODUCTION

Reputation is important. The reputation of this province — already known nationally and internationally for its diverse beauty and rugged individuality — is important to its future. Special Places 2000 will help strengthen Alberta's standing in the international community on this new front, which can only lead to new and exciting opportunities for Albertans.

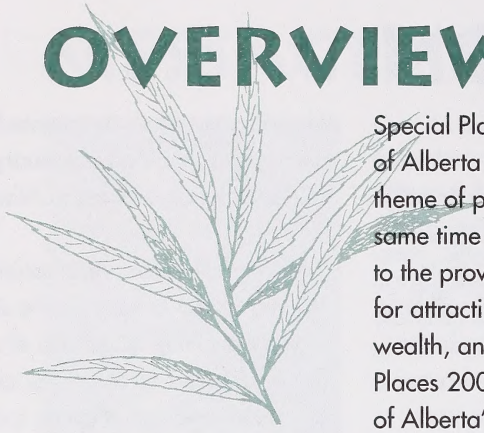
Special Places 2000 is consistent with the Government of Alberta strategy document entitled "Seizing Opportunity — Alberta's New Economic Development Strategy". A section from this document reads:

"Sustainable development — managing progress on the economy and the environment at the same time will form the context for provincial economic strategies. We must link environmental and economic agendas if we are to see future benefits of either."

Also, Premier Klein commented on preservation during his January 17, 1995 television address to Albertans.

"We're involved in preservation. We're helping to keep up the strong pioneer tradition in Alberta of safe, family oriented communities, clean air, water, and lots of green spaces and recreation opportunities, pride in our province and strength in our country."

OVERVIEW

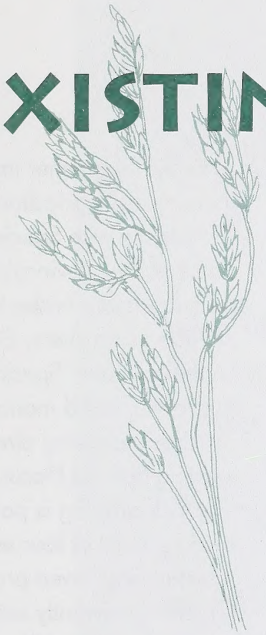


Special Places 2000 is a Government of Alberta initiative that embraces the theme of preservation while at the same time recognizes the importance to the province of creating a climate for attracting investment, generating wealth, and creating jobs. Special Places 2000 balances preservation of Alberta's natural heritage with the other three goals or cornerstones: outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism and economic development.

Alberta has done a excellent job of setting aside lands with preservation and conservation values; we are not starting from "square one". Currently 15.4 million acres (6.2 million ha) of Alberta is legislated, and contributes to the goals of Special Places 2000. An additional 7.3 million acres (2.9 million ha) is managed to meet various components of these goals. In total 22.6 million acres (9.2 million ha) of Alberta's landbase meets all or some of the goals of Special Places.

One only needs to look in Alberta's backyard to find examples of existing Special Places such as provincial parks, natural areas, ecological reserves and wilderness areas. These preservation/conservation oriented sites, which contribute to the four goals of Special Places, allow for a considerable range of uses: livestock grazing, oil and gas development, recreation and tourism development, and cultural and heritage appreciation.

EXISTING SPECIAL PLACES



Existing special places contribute to our sustainable development objectives in different ways:

- **Dinosaur Provincial Park and World Heritage Site** — This Park provides a national and international tourist destination contributing heavily to local and provincial economies. At the same time the paleontological and badlands values are the most important preservation and heritage appreciation values in Alberta's existing Special Places. The park, widely recognized for its high level of preservation, has accommodated limited, carefully considered oil and gas, and grazing activity.

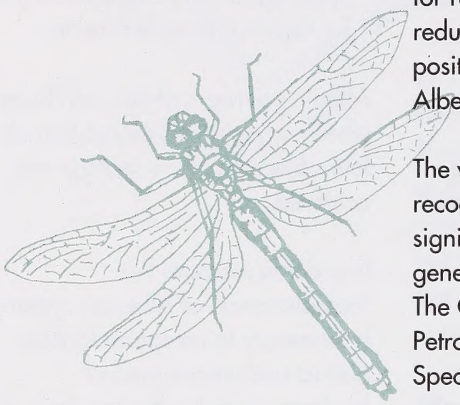
- **Cypress Hills Provincial Park** — Preserves a unique landscape and wildlife habitats. Cypress Hills continues to be one of the most popular sites in our present system - it caters to over 500,000 tourists and recreationists each year. At the same time, the site provides 12,000 Animal Unit Months of livestock grazing per year. All four cornerstones of Special Places are balanced at Cypress Hills.

- Small sites such as **Egg Island Ecological Reserve** satisfy a single objective — in this case the preservation of the only nesting site for Caspian Terns in Alberta.

Alberta's network of Special Places, when complete, will ensure that all four objectives of the strategy are achieved.

In order to measure the "completeness" of Alberta's system, it is necessary to recognize that six distinct and unique natural landscapes exist in the province. In our current system, these landscapes are represented to varying degrees. However, we have gaps in our system. Special Places 2000 focuses on providing the policy, the science, and the process, by which these gaps will be identified and filled - thereby completing a system that includes the environmental diversity of the province's six Natural Regions, by the end of 1998.

Based on a credible process of selecting sites systematically - considering economic, ecological, social and cultural considerations - Special Places will, in a balanced manner, preserve landscapes for the benefit of future generations of



Albertans. At the same time, completing the initiative in a timely way provides a climate of certainty for resource-based industries, reduces financial risk, and creates a positive international image for Alberta business.

The value of Special Places 2000 is recognized by one of this province's significant resource revenue generators, the oil and gas industry. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) supports Special Places. It describes the success of Special Places as:

"...a strategic interest for our industry and indeed, for the ongoing economic prosperity of Alberta."

Support for Special Places 2000 was gained early in the public consultation process from Alberta's forest industry. The Alberta Forest Products Association, jointly with the Alberta Environmental Network commented that:

"There should be protection, through legislation, of special places on the commercial timber base where there are unique natural environments or features that meet well defined scientific criteria..."

Activities of another important industry, the agriculture sector, are compatible with Special Places. Some of the province's best grasslands are under the stewardship of Alberta ranchers. Grazing will continue in new Special Places as an accepted, sound management practice. Grazing already occurs in existing Special Places, where livestock grazing is part of the management of four ecological reserves and seven provincial parks. If grazing currently exists within a candidate Special Place, this grazing will continue.

Special Places also support and attract a variety of recreation and tourism opportunities. Activities supported by Special Places include hiking, backcountry camping, guiding and outfitting. Albertans and visitors to the province will be in a position to take advantage of nature and outdoor recreation based tourism opportunities - from campgrounds and related services, to less intensive ecotourism activities.

Special Places can only succeed with the commitment and cooperation of leaders of government, industry, and interested groups, and will assist Albertans preserve a proud natural heritage for future generations.

POLICY STATEMENT

The vision for Special Places 2000, Alberta's strategy, is to complete a network of Special Places that represent the environmental diversity of the province's six Natural Regions (20 sub-regions) by the end of 1998.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- The four goals: preservation, outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism/ economic development, are the foundation and cornerstones of the Special Places initiative.

- The Government is committed to ensuring that there is consultation among government departments, agencies, stakeholders and local citizens.

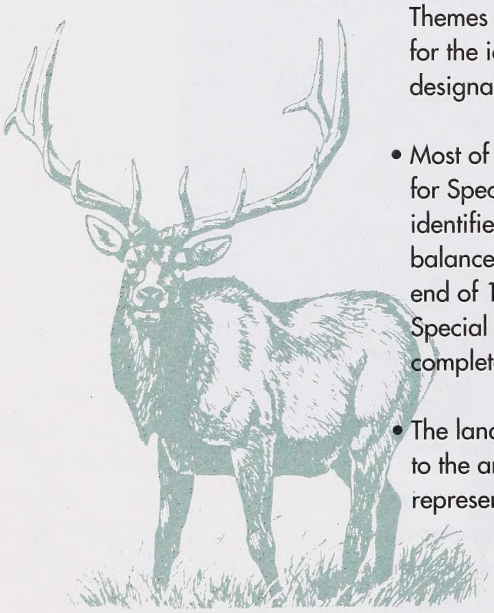
- The land classification system called Natural Regions (sub-regions) and Natural History Themes provides the scientific basis for the identification, review and designation of Special Places.

- Most of the land base requirements for Special Places 2000 will be identified by the end of 1996. The balance will be identified by the end of 1997. The entire system of Special Places is expected to be complete by the end of 1998.

- The land base target will be limited to the amount required to provide representative samples of the natural regions (sub-regions) while achieving all the goals in an integrated and balanced manner.

- All factors including ecological, social, cultural and economic will be included in the site selection, recommendation and decision making process using an integrated and balanced approach.

- A wide spectrum of designations using both legislative and policy mechanisms would be available under the Special Places 2000 initiative in order to designate and manage sites.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

- The Minister of Environmental Protection is responsible for implementation of the process.

- All recommendations for site designations will be referred to Standing Policy Committee on Natural Resources and Sustainable Development and Cabinet by the Minister, for decisions.

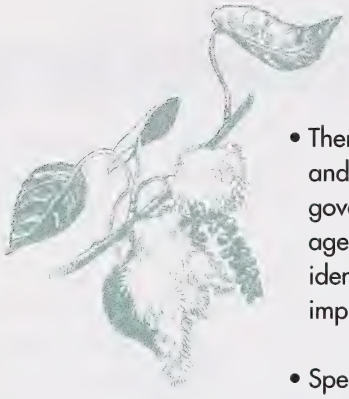
- Consultation with key stakeholders will be used to determine the details of the site selection and nomination process (see diagram and explanation on pages 9 and 10) based on the following principles. Representation from the public, including all interests, is necessary in the site selection and management process. The Government is committed to balanced and fair representation from all interests, including tenure holders, key stakeholders and the public, in the implementation of this initiative. Balanced and fair representation ensures that those participants whose interests are affected are provided an opportunity to participate in the process that reflects the level of impact on them.

- There is a need for strong local and regional participation and endorsement in the identification and nomination of candidate sites and a need for a provincial coordinating body.

- The Provincial Coordinating Committee will report to the Minister. Membership will reflect the sectors who have an interest and would advise the Minister on implementation and management of Special Places.

- At the local level, committees would represent local interests and users.

- The Government will provide professional and technical support as required in the identification, assessment and implementation process.



- There will be ongoing consultation and cooperation among government departments and agencies throughout the identification, assessment and implementation process.

- Special Places 2000 will help provide a context for the preservation components arising from the Forest Conservation Strategy, the Wetlands Policy, the Heritage Rivers Program and related initiatives. A new and improved Integrated Resource Planning (IRP) process will be the mechanism of land use planning for Alberta and will be the foundation under which these initiatives will be implemented. These initiatives will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure the highest possible integration, coordination and effective use of existing policies.

- Activities and uses for specific sites should be based on a framework of management intent and principles, site specific management plans developed with local input and key stakeholder input, and legislation, where required.

- The government will honour all commitments to tenure holders, utilizing the existing renewal processes. When potential sites are being identified, reviewed and possibly designated, the impacts on tenure holders will be addressed through the management planning process.

- Efforts will be made with other provincial jurisdictions to ensure we have a coordinated approach.

SPECIAL PLACES NOMINATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

1 Site nominated by any Albertan

2 Provinical Coordinating Committee reviews nomintion (*)

Interdepartmental comment

3 Local Committee contributes to management principles (*)

Government, scientific, technial and logistical assistance

4 Provinical Coordinating Committee review of management principles (*)

Interdepartmental comment

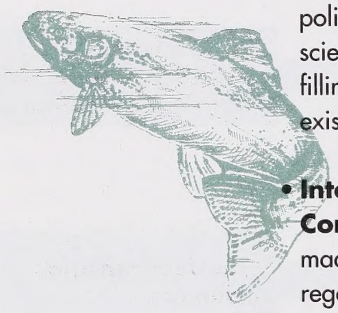
5 Ministerial and Cabinet review and approval (*)

6 Site establishment and management

** Progress toward site designation may be discontinued at these points.*

- **Sites Nominations** can be made by any Albertan by completing a Special Places 2000 site nomination form. Nomination forms are available from Environment Protection, Edmonton Information Centre by phoning 422-2079.

- **Provincial Coordinating Committee** nomination review includes an assessment of the site based on the Special Places 2000 policy and principles and/or scientific criteria with regard to filling the preservation gaps in the existing protected areas network.



- **Interdepartmental Committee** comment will be made within 45 days of referral regarding consistency of the nomination with approved integrated resource plans, legislation and other government policies.

- **Local Committee** contribution to management principles will include: identification of issues that need to be resolved, comments on proposed boundaries, options for designation, and guidelines for ongoing activities.

- **Provincial Coordinating Committee** review of management principles will be based on consistency with Special Places 2000 policy and principles.

- **Interdepartmental Committee** comment on management principles will be made within 45 days of referral regarding consistency with approved integrated resource plans, legislation and other government policies.

- Discontinuing a nomination may occur at the points indicated by (*). This may occur for example, if there is consensus that the goals and principles of Special Places 2000 cannot be achieved due to irresolvable issues. Should this occur, revised boundaries may be considered or the Provincial Committee will re-evaluate opportunities to fill the gaps as required to achieve the Special Places 2000 policy.

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